
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address: **1400 9th Street NW**
Landmark/District: **Shaw Historic District**

Meeting Date: **May 27, 2021**
H.P.A. Number: **21-142**

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The applicant, Catarina Ferreira, AIA, on behalf of property ownership group 1400 9th St NW LLC, seeks continuing concept review for a four-story addition to 1400 9th Street NW, a contributing building in the Shaw Historic District. The concept design was prepared by Architextual.

Property Description and Previous Board Review

The building on this corner of O Street and 9th Street does not have a recorded building permit and based on its type of construction and siting was likely built between 1850 and 1870. Its massing consists of a two-story main block and two-story rear wing. Several early 20th century commercial additions were made to the building including a one-story front addition, a projecting store front on the east elevation, and a one-story infill addition in front of the rear wing.

The Board first reviewed this project in February 2021. The original proposal was to reclassify the building to a non-contributing building based on its structural condition, demolish it and replace in with a new three-story building. The Board considered an engineer's report submitted by the applicant and left the record open so that Board members could inspect the property in person. The Board resumed the case at the March meeting and found that the building retained its structural integrity and denied the request to reclassify the building as non-contributing but advised that the rear wing could be removed and the one-story addition on the front could be reconstructed to its current dimensions.

Revised Proposal

The applicant has revised the proposal in response to the Board's direction. The main block of the historic house will be retained, restored, slightly altered, and the rear wing will be replaced with a four-story addition configured as a projecting-bay rowhouse facing 9th Street. As part of the addition, a stepped two-story component would project off the side elevation of the addition and sit on top of the northwest corner of the historic house. The addition would be tinted brick and fenestrated with contemporary window configurations. The projecting bay, the two-story component on top the historic house, smaller store front projections would be clad in a cement board. The roof would not be occupied by decks or penthouses.

The historic building shows several small alterations, including a new cornice on the long 9th Street elevation, new double-hung window openings, an expanded projecting storefront, basement areaways between projections, a reconstructed one-story addition at the front of a

building and a new areaway in front of that. Other than part of the addition, the roof of the historic house is not occupied by a deck or penthouse.

Evaluation

The revisions to the concept are substantial and positive with the obvious primary improvement being the substantial retention of the historic house. The rear wing of the house is a minor character defining feature, but its severely deteriorated condition makes it reasonable that it be demolished to accommodate an addition.

The house will be altered in several modest ways, but two proposed alterations are incompatible and should not proceed: the new cornice and storefront dimensions on the 9th Street elevations. The house has a front oriented to O Street by virtue of the original wood cornice on that façade, while the long side elevation along 9th Street is an unornamented masonry wall stepped to follow the barely sloped flat roof. This an expected orientation and hierarchy of ornament commonly seen in a house of this era and adding a cornice to the long side elevation is not compatible with that form. The reconstructed storefront projection shown for 9th Street (Sheet HP.502.1) is wider than the original storefront (Sheet HP.001). Reconstruction is the correct level of intervention for this component, but the new storefront—and transoms above—should keep the existing dimensions. In its current size the storefront is a compatibly scaled component of the historic house and expanding it would give it an over-proportioned relationship with the historic house. Adding the two window openings to either side of the 9th Street elevation will have little impact on the character of the house if the cornice and storefront are resolved.

The addition takes an approach frequently endorsed by the Board in cases where there is room for a side addition to a rowhouse, but where the dimensions and proportions of the historic house should be preserved. By making the addition appear to be a separate building, it sets itself apart from the historic house leaving its dimensions and proportions undisturbed. The front façade of the addition needs one small revision to accomplish the form of an independent rowhouse, which is the projecting bay should be pulled 9” to the north and allow the main face of the façade to run from ground to roof next to the historic house. This will replicate the part of the projection code that requires that there be a clear space of 9” between the party line and the nearest wall of the projection.

At four-stories, the height of the addition is compatible with the surrounding 3-story historic buildings. It is only slightly taller, but this height difference is moderated by the other components of the project that are one and two stories tall, which diffuse the impact of the size of the addition. The feature at the top of the project that does require some further study is the two-story portion positioned on top of the historic building. Typically, adding on top of a small historic building is strongly discouraged because it is difficult to do compatibly and usually has a negative impact on the scale and size of the of the historic building. In this case however, the component is seen more as an adjunct of the adjacent addition rather than a solitary form landing on the historic building. Conceptually this component is promising, but its details can be revised in several ways which would make it sufficiently compatible. Designing its southern elevation into a fenestrated formal façade instead of a blank wall, varying the material so it is not all cement panel, setting back the railing, or adjusting a roof height are all recommendations that would give it fuller design and acknowledge the importance of the view from O Street.

Several basement areaways are proposed in separate areas on the street faces of the project. Long continuous areaways are problematic--especially in residential areas and blocks where the public space is landscaped—because they give the appearance of the building sinking into a hole or they intrude into a park-like setting. However, in this case, the areaways benefit from being separated by other building components so that the areaways are not continuous and the forgiving commercial context of 9th Street with its storefronts and unparked public space.

No structural drawings are included in this drawing set, but as the project moves through the permit stage, staff can assure that the structural components of the building (load bearing walls, floor joist systems and roof rafters) will be substantially retained in accord with the preservation regulations.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board find the 4-story side addition proposed for 1400 9th Street NW in the Shaw Historic District to be compatible with the historic building and historic district, that the treatment of the historic building be revised to eliminate the 9th Street cornice reduce the width of the projection, that that the two-story element atop the historic building be revised as suggested above, and that final approval be delegated to staff.

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